

舞・HIME DESTINY

THE DRAGON
PRIESTESS

WELL-MADE FRIENDS

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Hisayuki



Mai-HiME Destiny **~The Dragon Priestess~**

Chapter 7: The Big Night

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People are greedy. Even though at least once humanity has stood at an open door, they have never walked through it.

However, even once the door was closed, there were a few people who kept walking towards it, with their hands tied behind their backs.

Known as the “Mizugane”, they were obsessed with the mysteries of life and death.

Here in Japan, two areas were established.

In one, there has been a government run by powerful people since ancient times. Here, a mirror was brought from across the ocean and the shape of a dragon was carved on its back.

The other, in the north, was populated by people who had crossed the Rubeshube River. The Mizugane moved there and attached the name of a dragon to a mountain.

And it was here that a priestess began congregating children with strange abilities.

She had had an iron lock placed upon her, had her powers sealed many times by those who feared her, and by those who sought the dragon's power. People are truly greedy.



“Geeze! It smells like sulfur!”

“It really does. We should get out of here and go shopping.”

“Can we get something to eat too?”

“Of course, of course. Anyways, I'm not sticking around here!”

“You're so loud, Yayoi...”

The girl became so mad that her tiny body began to shake. She took an angry bite out of her fried egg. She was first year high-school student Oota Yayoi. With her was her tall and lanky classmate, looking around at the people in the area, Sayuri Ichinose.

Suddenly, rain began to fall all around this strange couple, interrupting the cultural festival's preparations and forcing them to take shelter under the eaves outside the auditorium entrance.

From time to time, a flash of lightning would strike, causing the two of them to start listening for the thunder to follow.

“Miya-chan, are you with Hinagiku-san?”

“Maybe.”

The two had another friend from their class, Suzuki Miya. In middle school, they usually had lunch together, but since starting high school they haven't seen each other as much. Miya began to hang out more and more with the second-year Hinagiku Tomoe, but she still talks to Yayoi and Sayuri from time to time.

“Is Hinagiku-san really in the Suzaku Association!?”

“So people say...”

Sayuri's quiet voice was growing more and more irritated.

The Suzaku Association was the largest organization within the Academy, and had been spending the past day fighting it out with the student council. But this wasn't simply an argument among the students. An unseen force was pulling the strings. Someone was stirring up all these mind-reading, psychokinesis-using students...

Although, Hoshinomiya Academy is surrounded by mountains and located in the remote Okhotsk region of Hokkaido. With so many boys and girls imprisoned here, cut off from the rest of the world and not knowing what to do with their incredible powers, an event like this may have been inevitable anyways.

Nonetheless, just like Yayoi and Sayuri, many students had been expecting a normal cultural festival.

“What about that handcuffs girl?”

“You mean Kagura Mayo-san?”

“Everything that's happened is centered around that girl...”

“Really? Haven't we been ready to fight since before she arrived?”

“No, I'm sure that girl is the cause. Before she came, the Suzaku Association was completely dormant. Surely you, Miya-chan, remember that...”

“...Ah!”

“Wha...What is it?”

“That's right, I remember! Kagura-san was walking up the dorm stairs with a blank look in her eyes, followed by a bunch of people with a strange feeling about them...”

“Yes, I thought they were strange too!”

“I think they went up to the rooftop. Then it started to rain.”

Sayuri looked up to the sky. Yayoi started smelling herself.

“Something still smells like sulfur!”

“I think it's the fried egg...”

“No, it's too strong for it to be that!”

At that moment, there was a brilliant flash of red light. Sayuri and Yayoi immediately turned around and looked up at the dorm rooftop.

“A...a rocket?”

“Um...I don't think so...”

Yayoi dropped her fried egg as Sayuri embraced her.

The huge clock tower on the roof of the school dorm may have looked old, but it was solidly built. Even with telekinetic powers, destroying it should have been impossible. For any normal student, anyways. But it was gone!

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“Wha...what's happening!? Is it the Suzaku Association!?”

“I...I don't know...”

The two of them were shivering in fear. They couldn't believe the Suzaku Association could cause such destruction, but there was more they didn't know...



There were flashes of light in the Academy Chief's office.

A computer screen was glowing red. After taking forty blasts of flame, its camera was no longer able to send video. The computer switched to a different rooftop camera and adjusted its angle so it could be used instead.

“Expanding the surveillance system turned out to be a good move. Oooh...isn't that a beautiful sight...”

Seeing Kagura Mayo emerge from the tornado of fire, a smile crept across Kanzaki Rei's face.

The dragon priestess had been released from within her. The hot wind had undone the twintails Mayo always tied her hair in. Zooming in, the expression of exhilaration on her face could be seen clearly. Her doll-like beauty gone, she looked as savage as a wild animal. A beauty that had struck fear into the hearts of people since long ago.

“The battle must be over by now...there's no way the Suzaku Association or anyone else could still be standing.”

Kanzaki Rei had said in the past that he didn't like the group of students who considered themselves revolutionaries.

Tennouji Shion probably felt the same way.

The battle had been a cakewalk. The clocktower lay in ruins. Everyone there had fled in terror, and all it had taken was Mayo...no, the Dragon Priestess...that's what she's called now.

But before all that, surely the Suzaku Association's leader, Higurashi Akane, had been following Mayo. She entered deep within Mayo's mind, and caused so much trauma that she self-destructed. Truly an awful power, capable of destroying Mayo without a fight. But what Akane also did was break the seal deep within Mayo.

In short, the Suzaku Association brought about their own destruction. Quite an ironic outcome.

And exactly what Kanzaki Rei and the Hoshinomiya organization had been hoping for.

“Her fiery emergence. Her brutal yet intelligent nature. Surely, Kouryuu will appear as well.”

“Kouryuu?”

“As its name suggests, it's a red dragon (‘Kouryuu’ is spelt with the kanji for ‘red’ and ‘dragon’). In the New Testament, a monster with seven heads and ten horns is mentioned. That monster is Kouryuu. A fire-breathing god who drew a third of the stars of heaven with his tail. Kouryuu fought against and was defeated by the Archangel Michael, who sealed him away in the fiery and sulfurous core of the Earth to be released after 1000 years so that they could fight again.”

“You're referring to the Red Dragon in ‘The Revelation of Saint John the Divine’, right? But wasn't that a western dragon?”

“Huh!? Nagi!? You're still here!?”

“That's not a very nice way to react to someone who's given you all sorts of information. I came back to help you our against Tomoe-chan.”

“Hinagiku Tomoe was already defeated by Shion.”

“Oh, my mistake then.”

Homura Nagi playfully stuck out his tongue.

“But to be able to defeat Tomoe-chan so easily, Shion-chan must be...”

“I see principal Kanzaki is very knowledgeable.”

“Ah, Chairwoman.”

A voice that sounded like the ringing of a bell placed everyone at ease. Wearing her trademark suit, Hoshinomiya Fuuka Academy Chairwoman Himeno Fumi entered the room.

”You seem to know a lot about the western world's legends. Just the other day, weren't you talking about Wyverns?”

“There's a legend from England called ‘The Mordiford Wyvern’. Even though Wyverns are part of the dragon family, and dragons are a personification of evil in the west, in this legend a girl becomes attached to a dragon. Not only that, but despite being ‘evil’ they're considered a good enough omen to be worthy of presence on the coat of arms of both London and of the british royal family.”

“What a delightful story!”

“Actually, before I came to Hoshinomiya I was a researcher of ancient legends. Western dragons, eastern dragons, nagas, etc. all have slightly different shapes, but don't you think their core bodies look essentially the same?”

“Didn't Mayo destroy your Wyvern statue a while ago?”

“Haha, you sure know how poke my sore spots, Chairwoman.”

“You said ‘I don't want to be eaten just yet,’ too.”

Soon after Kagura Mayo arrived a month ago, she was involved in an event that saw the Wyvern statue blown to smithereens. The statue had been based on “The Mordiford Wyvern”. Kanzaki Rei knew that it had been destroyed by Mayo, but because his goal was to awaken the real dragon, he was willing to overlook the incident.

As Fumi had said, Rei didn't want to be eaten just yet.

“Now that she's been awakened, our research will be able to progress.”

“You're so cute when you try to act serious.”

“You should try to be serious for a moment, too.”

“Geeze, what's with these people” is what Nagi was thinking.

The two people at the top of Fuuka Academy's parent organization, Hoshinomiya, were having a friendly chat in the middle of a major crisis. Being baked, boiled, and eaten seemed like a likely fate for both of them.

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“She...Fu Hao is saying something.”

Everyone looked at the monitor. Tennouji Shion stared at Mayo, who was in front of the giant tornado of fire.

“Can you hear the Dragon Priestess' voice, Tennouji-kun? It was really a good idea to have you come here. In ancient China, Fu Hao...”

“From talking about England to talking about Ancient China, what a change!”

“Nagi...”

“Yeah, yeah. I can't hear her voice. I'll be a good boy and go snoop around for information.”

With that, Nagi threw up his hands and walked out of the principal's office.



Flashes of lightning struck down from a dark cloud, illuminating the rooftop of the school dorm.

Despite the rain, the various fires around remained flickering. The clock tower lay in ruins. Sitting on the ground with an expressionless face was Higurashi Akane. Also there were Kuga Natsuki, Yuuki Nao, Sugiura Midori, Fujino Shizuru, and...Kagura Mayo...

“The handcuffs are gone...”

Natsuki couldn't believe her eyes. The handcuffs that had constrained Mayo ever since she had arrived. The handcuffs that even Shizuru and Natsuki's MiKO powers had been unable to remove, were now gone.

“But isn't she just standing there doing nothing now?”

“Aren't you doing the same?”

“Wha...what did you say!?”

Nao ignored Midori's protest.

“This is bad, it's clear she's not returning to normal.”

“Yeah.”

Natsuki nodded her head.

Kagura Mayo had completely transformed. It was more than just the disappearance of the handcuffs and the different hairstyle. Just a while before, the Suzaku Association members had shown a combined display of power that was nothing less than astounding. But even that wasn't enough.

The fight had shown Mayo's brutal nature, treating her opponents as nothing more than insects. She was nothing like the Mayo they knew!

The Kagura Mayo that laughed with them, the Kagura Mayo that cried with them. Surely, the Kagura Mayo in front of them couldn't be her!

“Hm? She's saying something...that this body now belongs to Fu Hao (fukou)”

“Misfortune? (fukou)”

“You could be mistaken for Suzushiro-san! I'm pretty sure ‘Fukou’ in this case is written with the ‘fu’ from ‘adult woman’ (fujoshi) and the ‘kou’ from ‘like’ (suki - The ‘su’ kanji in ‘suki’ is pronounced ‘kou’ when read alone. When Fukou is written using these kanji, it means ‘Fu Hao’ but when written with different kanji, it means ‘misfortune’).”

“Fu Hao? Isn't that a Chinese name?”

“In ancient China...I think it was the Shang Dynasty, which was three thousand years ago...that was the name of China's first ever female general (onnashougun).”

“What!? A womanizer!?! (onnazuki) I thought you might be!”

“That's mean! Everyone knows that I only have eyes for Natsuki.”

“Geeze...”

“Anyways, it was three thousand years ago! Three thousand years! That's a thousand years before the birth of Christ!”

“You and Christ were only born nine years apart though, right?”

“How rude! I'm seventeen! Seventeen!”

“If I had a yen for every time I heard you say that...anyways, even if she's three thousand years old, or whatever, why do we have to fight her?”

“Eh?”

The history maniac Midori, who had been so excited, was shocked silent.

At a time like this, the stray-cat-like girl, the girl who hardly ever showed up to class, the academy's number one realist, Yuuki Nao had spoken up.

“Well, why should we?”

Having just seen the terrible extent of Mayo's powers, having just seen the most powerful group of students in the entire academy annihilated, it did indeed seem unlikely that they would stand a chance.

“Besides, we don't even know what her goal is. Why should we just start a fight we'll probably lose for no reason?”

“That's not a bad idea, Nao. However, from all this I've learned one thing.”

In front of Mayo, Natsuki raised her head and looked up at the schoolgirl.

“Clearly, Higurashi Akane is in trouble.”

“The Suzaku Association members have been completely defeated.”

“They've all run away, forsaking their queen in order to save themselves.”

“The once-monolithic Suzaku Association is no more.”

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“However, we aren't associated with them.”

“In fact, I'm in the Natsu-Mayo-Shio gr...”

At that moment, Midori clamped her hand over Natsuki's mouth.

Of course, the name of the group Natsuki mentioned was just one she made up on the spot using shortened versions of their given names. In spring, Natsuki, who had always been a lone wolf, for some reason decided to team up with the transfer students Tennouji Shion and Kagura Mayo. Of course, a team of only three people is basically a joke. Midori had actually found it amusing that the academy battles were starting up again.

But this was no longer a laughing matter. Shion wasn't even here, and Mayo had now turned into a bigger threat than anything they ever could have imagined.

“That name is completely wrong! It looks like I'll have to take over here.”

“Ah!”

Nao cried out. Immediately Natsuki grabbed her revolver and fired a shot at Mayo's feet.

“You moron!”

“You show her, Natsuki!”

“Sh...She's looking over here!”

Up until then, Mayo hadn't actually been paying any attention to them.

“Mayo...no, who are you?”

“Who...who are you, who are you...who...”

Mayo simply expressionlessly repeated Natsuki's question several times.

“I'm the one who's asking, but if you want to know what to call me, you can call me Kuga-senpai.”

“Natsuki shivered. She experienced a moment of absolution. Inside Mayo's head, she was trying to figure out her own name.”

“Well, that's enough for the self-introduction. Just remember that my name is Kuga-senpai.”

“Eh?”

““Something like this is impossible! How can monsters like this exist in this world!?” is what I saw.”

“Ah.”

When Hinagiku Tomoe had created illusions of all sorts of mythical monsters, Natsuki never believed they were real from the very beginning. Nonetheless, a while ago Mayo had somehow made a bright red dragon appear.

“That's...”

(Stay where you are. Listen to me, and don't move.)

Nao had secretly relayed instructions not to move through telepathy.

(I have a plan, I'm going to create a distraction so that we can all escape. Midori will teleport out of here with Higurashi. The two of us will cover her.)

(A distraction?)

(It shouldn't be hard, I don't think she's paying much attention to what's going on around her.)

“A while ago, there was a red dragon. Did you create it?”

“Since the beginning of time, humanity has written stories of a red dragon. His name is Kouryuu, and I have summoned him many times.”

“Kouryuu...So in order to summon him, you've taken over Mayo's body!?”

“Taken over...that isn't quite correct. I, the Dragon Priestess, was sealed inside this body. Only now have I finally been freed. After this, I will allow this body to be possessed by Kouryuu and return to the land of Ryuuju.”

(Now!)

Nao had given the signal.

Then something completely unexpected happened.

From underneath Mayo's skirt, her white panties began to slip down her legs.

“...Eh!?”



In addition to the rain, it was beginning to get windy.

It felt almost like the wind was coming down from the sky. If you looked up, you would see a sky completely covered in cloud except for a few areas where beams of moonlight were able to escape through and shine down.

“There's a full moon out tonight”

The night sky is the best out in the mountains where there isn't any light pollution or skyscrapers. In fact, when the Hoshinomiya Organization scouted this area, they were told by locals that it had the best view of the night sky of anywhere. Seeing it, it feels like Natsuki's remark about the Milky Way can finally be fully understood. But today, everyone was in too much of a hurry to stop and look up at the sky.

“Before long, the Hoshinomiya people are going to want to know what happened today. They've been planning for this since the beginning, after all.”

The sound of the leaves on the trees being shaken by rainfall could be heard.

“What!?”

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However, the sounds weren't caused by the rain. They were caused by Sugiura Midori hanging upside-down like a bat.

“Natsuki-chin, catch!”

“Wha!?”

From above, Natsuki caught the dropped Akane, causing her to fall butt-first to the ground. Fortunately, the ground was soft.

“Ouch! Why would you do something dangerous li...hey! Are you drunk!?”

By herself, Midori jumped to the ground. Natsuki frowned. She was so drunk that she started wobbling on her feet upon landing.

“Even you, who is a drunkard among drunkards, is losing her balance?”

“Haaa?”

“Saaitimes when ah teleport, ah end up like dis, but ah'll be all good afta a while...*hic*”

“Must be tough...”

“Dizzy from telaportan here, dizzy from teleportan there. But somebody got teleported there.”

“Nao.”

Yuuki Nao then also fell from the tree.

“Pretty good plan, huh? Fujino didn't come after us?”

“Shizuru wouldn't mess up. If she's not here, it's because she doesn't want to be.”

“Avin dah presdant woulda bin a halp.”

“Well, it would increase our overall fighting ability.”

“Do you think that maybe that glasses girl could be helpful?”

“Most of all, at a time like this I think we need Shion...”

However, it seemed like Natsuki was really thinking about someone else.

“But in the end, we have to face up to the fact that we've only got Higurashi.”

Midori had sat up Higurashi Akane against the tree, and she hadn't moved since then. She still had the same blank look in her eyes that she'd had when they escaped. It was difficult to believe that not long ago it seemed like she was poised to take over the academy by force.

“She might be a valuable source of information...”

“Her eyes are so empty it's almost like you could get lost in them...”

“And we don't have time to wait until she comes back to her senses.”

“Ah, you wanna 'ave Yukino read 'er mind.”

“Not a bad idea...Well, not bad for you anyways.”

“Eh!?”

Natsuki stopped Midori and Nao from arguing. Suddenly, a small voice started crying out.

All three of them turned to see the voice's owner.

“Wh...what? How did these panties get here?”

The owner of the voice was none other than Higurashi Akane. When Nao created a distraction by telekinetically pulling down Mayo's white panties, they had landed on Akane.

“Haha, oh wow. I never noticed that her panties landed on you! Last time, I wasn't even able to get them all the way off!”

Nao and Mayo had actually once before had such an encounter, when Nao asked her how Mayo was able to use the toilet with her handcuffs on.

“Man, you guys 'ave so much fun. Stuff like that never 'appens to me. *hic*”

“Normally, saying something like that would have elicited a reaction, but in this case Midori's usual tsukkomi, Natsuki, ignored her and turned back towards Akane.

“Gettin' to spend so much time with Mayo must be fun...you'll 'ave to tell me more about the things you do together sometime.”

“I'm sure you'll find out what it's like...”

Akane was trying to concentrate. For some reason, her vision was blurry.

“Mayo's past is something I know nothing about, but you, who was able to dive into the depths of her mind, must have found something.”

“However, that caused something inside Mayo's body to awaken. Some kind of monster that had been sleeping within her all along.”

“I guess you guys should know about it too. You won't even have to find Kikukawa-san. My powers can show you directly. You should ask me nicely, there isn't much time.”

“Um...please?”

Midori, Nao and Natsuki couldn't believe what happened next. The raw, shocking images of Mayo's past that Akane had seen began to flow into their minds.

“Th...this...”

The rosy-faced Midori's complexion turned pale.

“The village is disappearing!”

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Not only that, but Kagura Mayo was floating above the floodwaters. At the same time, houses, cars, people and animals were all being swallowed by the raging rapids. A little girl who was bobbing about in the water was crying. The scene became blurry as tears welled up in Midori's eyes.



“As I thought, the academy was responsible.”

Nao had said it unabashedly. Ever since Kagura Mayo had entered the school, it had seemed like something was happening behind the scenes. The mysterious explosion. The Yakuza invasion. Mayo not having any memories. All of it was suspicious.

Nao believed it had all been planned in advance. The helicopter that had rescued the six-year-old Mayo from the flood had Kanzaki Rei and Fumi Himeno in it. The Hoshinomiya Organization had been planning all this for almost ten years. Ever since Mayo was a little girl.

“Isn't gathering people with supernatural powers and teaching them how to assimilate into society supposed to be the purpose of this school? This feels like some kind of bad joke...”

“So you believe me?”

Natsuki nodded her head several times.

Normally, one would think that the dragon was simply a false memory caused by a child's imagination, or a hallucination caused by the stressful situation. Mayo was only six years old at the time, after all.

Natsuki was still reeling from what she had seen. How could a little girl like Mayo summon three huge dragons!? One red, one blue, and one black, all flying around.

“Three dragons! What would we be able to do about even two dragons!?”

Suddenly, Natsuki let out a scream.

The sky had turned red. It wasn't even like a sunset. It was more like the entire sky had been lit on fire.

“What's happening!?”

“L...Look!”

Akane began shaking and screaming.

“I didn't think it would happen this quickly!”

“I knew someday we'd regret having no way to escape from this school. Midori, are you still drunk?”

“*hic* I'll be better in a few minutes.”

“We haven't got time to wait. Everyone, let's go!”

From inside the forest, they could see pillars of flame shooting upwards. A hot wind began rustling the leaves on the trees. The forest around them began catching fire. From within a tornado of fire, Mayo's...no...Kouryuu's laughter could be heard.



“From its outside appearance, you'd think it had always been strong.”

In the student council room, Shizuru was staring at the white ceiling.

A short time ago, Kouryuu and the Suzaku Association had fought each other on the school dorm rooftop. The clock tower had been completely destroyed in the chaos. The ceiling didn't have a single crack in it, but the window glass had been severely damaged in past conflicts.

“If this building was designed the same way, then it might be possible that it could also be...”

Shizuru once again looked around the room, even though she should have known every inch of it by now. Her stare was as cold as ice.

Two staff members who had been defeated by Hinagiku Tomoe were still in the nurse's office. The black uniform Shizuru was wearing served as proof of her position of student council president, but now she was a president without any staff!

“Well then, you're just going to sit here drinking tea and not doing anything about the situation?”

The door on Shizuru's personal locker opened.

Inside was none other than Okuzaki Akira, wearing a change of clothes that looked like they came from a documentary about old Japan, and carrying a filing case full of secret academy files and records.

“From the Asuka Period all the way up to the Showa Era, there have been many recorded sightings of dragons in Japan. Tonight, we enter that list as the first sighting of the Heisei Era. Nonetheless, I was surprised that Fu Hao is involved...”

On the rooftop, Akira had heard the mention of that ancient name. The oldest recorded mention of a dragon sighting in Japan is in the Nihon Shoki, which mentions a sighting in the first year of Empress Saimei's reign, which was 655 CE.

However, Fu Hao lived in China during the Shang Dynasty. That was three thousand years ago! 1600 years before the first recorded sighting in Japan!

“She was a female general whose wisdom, courage and beauty was unmatched. At the end of the 19th century, her tomb was found. It was in a spiral shape, just like a coiled up dragon. It seems she was somehow able to possess Kagura-san and wait for an opportunity to reveal herself...”

Considering she was talking about the appearance of a formidable enemy, Shizuru's voice was quite calm.

“Wait here, please.”

It was Kanzaki Reito's voice. Shizuru grabbed her Katana from the metal locker as he entered the room.

“Reito-san, is there something you need?”

“Not at all. I just wanted to apologize about earlier.”

He was referring to yesterday's cultural festival. The student council and the Suzaku Association were in the midst of an all-out war. The student council had captured Hinagiku Tomoe, and as a result the Suzaku Association staged a counterattack, resulting in chaos in the student council room. In the middle of the crisis, Shizuru had called Reito. In such an emergency, she couldn't very well disregard that he was the Principal's younger brother.

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However, Reito wasn't his usual cool and collected self. His speech was so nervous it bordered on being incomprehensible. The way he was babbling, he could have been about to make a confession of love! But we'll never know for sure, because before he could get his act together, word of the incident on the rooftop reached Shizuru and she had to head there right away.

“You're not here to talk about the cultural festival?”

“Well, of course I want to talk about that too.”

Reito noticed that Shizuru was holding her sword.

“Ah, don't worry, you shouldn't leave.”

“Don't you think it's strange that your sword wasn't able to cut Kagura-san's handcuffs?”

“As Buddha once said ‘Be greatly aware of the present’, in *iai* the timing of the sword draw is everything. I drew my sword at the wrong time, that's all.”

“Did Onii-sa...the principal say that to you?”

“No, *I* said it to her.”

After Akira finished speaking, Shizuru looked at Reito's face. He had the same sharp looks as the principal, with eyes full of determination. It was hard to believe that not long ago he was behaving so nervously and indecisively.

“The Hoshinomiya organization is not a monolith. We should show this to others involved in the organization.”

“As you wish.”

“Will do.”

With that, they both left as easily as they entered. Certainly, as had been said, the timing of a sword-draw is important. However, there was something even more important - the person the sword is being drawn against, and that is what Shizuru had been thinking about.

“So...what to do now...”



“Damn! When did this brushfire start!?”

“Just keep yourself together!”

The night sky had turned red and the sound of roaring fire could be heard from as far away as they could hear.

A tornado of fire seemed to be controlling the blaze to target Natsuki, Nao, Midori and Akane.

“Geh!”

Natsuki grabbed her revolvers and emptied every round in them into the tornado, but it didn't so much as slow down.

“It's no good, Natsuki-chin. What can a gun do to a tornado?”

“You're more irrational than Suzushiro.”

“That's a pretty big insult!”

“Nao, why don't you pull off the stunt from the rooftop again?”

“I don't think the same trick will work twice. This time, our best chance is probably to attack all together.”

“That's out of the question!”

“You seem back up to full strength, Akane-chin.”

Having to give Akane a piggyback was starting to tire Midori.

Indeed, staging a telekinetic attack given the conditions would be all but impossible. Even if they had enough power to win, there was no way of getting a lock on their target. Mayo...Kouryuu could be anywhere inside the tornado of fire. Furthermore, the falling rain was causing the smoke of the fire to be even thicker than it otherwise would have been, making it impossible to see so much as their hands in front of their faces. The situation placed them at a severe disadvantage.

And then...

“Ugh!”

Akane still seemed okay, but Midori had fallen on one knee, clutching her throat.

“What's wrong!?”

“Can't brea...”

“Crap! There isn't enough oxygen in the air!”

The fire all around them was consuming all the oxygen. Natsuki also began to feel dizzy.

“Hu...hurry...let's attack!”

Natsuki tried to take aim, but she was too dizzy and ended up hitting a tree. Then she fell to the ground and nearly passed out. Her clothes started to smolder, releasing an awful odor. But instead of trying to escape, she pushed down on the ground and got back up.

The tornado of fire was right in front of her. With great effort, Natsuki sneered at it. She wondered when it had caught up with her.

Natsuki looked up at the sky. Having come all this way, she hoped to see a deeply moving sight.

But she couldn't see a single star.

Instead, she saw a person.

“A...a person!?”

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Yes, a person was falling from the sky.

From high in the sky, that person fell straight down into the flaming tornado. Their landing caused a flash of light and an explosion that knocked Natsuki off her feet, and caused the tornado of fire to dissipate.

When the dust cleared, standing there was a girl wearing a Fuuka Academy uniform.

“Wha...what the hell!?”

“Nao, do you know who that is!?”

“I don't. Midori, Akane, do you know!?”

“Wait...Shion!?”

“Shion...no way, that glasses girl!?”

Indeed, with her glasses glowing red from reflecting the fire's light, it was none other than Tennouji Shion!

“Kuga-senpai, I'm glad to see you're still okay.”

“‘Okay’ isn't how I would put it. What did you just do!?”

“A tornado might be invincible from them outside, but on the inside it's very weak. As you saw, if you attack from above, disabling it is no problem.”

“I see...no, wait! I don't see!”

“Please run away now. This isn't over yet.”

“Not over...This isn't something you can handle by yourself!”

“Don't worry. I will defeat Mayo...no, I will defeat Kouryuu.”

“You might be able to say that easily, but doing it easily is another matter altogether.”

“Yes, I know.”

Shion's demeanor was as cool as ice. As far as Natsuki knew, it was rare for Shion to profess a desire to “defeat” someone. But even moreso, how could she, of all people, be willing to fight Mayo!?

“What you're saying is impossible!”

Natsuki was thinking of all the things that were likely to go wrong. Not long ago, she had been sure it was impossible to so much as land a hit on Mayo! There's no way Shion could have a plan, nobody had known Mayo could transform like this until tonight! Unless Shion knew something nobody else did...

“Senpai, I'm really sorry that you ended up getting involved in this, but now, you have to leave.”

From the other side of the fire and smoke, something jumped out. There was a black mark that moved all around her body. She launched a group of large trees as though they were missiles, some of them almost hitting.

Their impact caused a huge noise and caused the earth to shake. They drove deep into the ground, creating holes that they stuck out of. Surely, one of these large trees would become their gravestone.

“This time, you're going to be...”

Floating above a tree, a smiling Kouryuu was looking down.

“You were saying?”

“You...”

There, at the top of the same tree, was Shion! For the first time, the smile vanished from Kouryuu's face.

“Oh, I see...you're the tiger. However, we're not in Longxi, and this time I have a priestess of the finest quality.”

Kouryuu stuck out his tongue and licked Mayo's upper lip.

“Kouryuu, please leave Mayo's body.”

“Ha! That's all you've got, tiger!?”

As Kouryuu extended his arms, circles of red light materialized and began spinning around his wrists, exactly where Mayo's handcuffs had been.

He fired off a fireball aimed directly for Shion's chest. Shion dodged quickly and called out to her “Tiger's Tusk”. The dagger in her hand began to glow. It released a flash of light, and in a single move Shion thrust it straight for Kouryuu's chest.

“Guh! Th...this...”

The weapon had pierced Kouryuu. He staggered, with a look of pure disbelief on his face. Instantly, the mark on Mayo's face vanished and returned to being the dragon birthmark below her neck. Kouryuu was gone.



舞-HiME★DESTINY～龍の巫女～

“Your three-thousand years of life...my feelings...Mayo's suffering...Is this all it comes to?”



“Oh dear, this is terrible! The academy's dragon...”

Sitting down with folded hands, Himeno Fumi was referring to what she had just seen on the television monitor. Despite her apparent distress, her voice remained cheerful.

“Where did we go wrong!? Hoshinomiya did so much research and planning! The dragon should have been mine!”

Kanzaki Rei wanted to correct Fumi, but didn't.

“Still, who ever would have thought that Tennouji-san had so much power?”

“Perhaps even though Kouryuu was awakened, his power wasn't able to fully awaken, and that's why Shion-kun was able to beat him. She is our insurance, after all.”

“That's right, that girl is insurance.”

About one month ago, Fumi had received a report on the students' powers from Dr. Sagisawa Youko. The results were a considerable surprise to Kanzaki. Certainly, part of this was Kagura Mayo's results, but even more surprising were Tennouji Shion's. She too was indispensable.

“I guess we're going to have to look into the matter of her missing memories. Just figuring out Kouryuu was hard enough. Things are going to get busy now that we need to be prepared for the next dragon to awaken, won't they?”

“Of Kagura Mayo's three sealed dragons, two remain. One with blue scales and one with black. The blue dragon is the dragon of water. According to ancient records, he was prayed to in order to bring rain in times of drought, or stop it in times of flood. The black one...actually, I don't know anything about him.”

“Incredible! Something even the principal doesn't know about!”

“Is it really so unbelievable?”

“Principal...”

The voice came from somewhere else.

“Oh, Tennouji-kun. It seems I've put you through quite a bit of trouble.”

“Put it in your report.”

The computer monitor was displaying a vivid image of Shion's location. She was quite some distance from the site of the fire, and was with several other students, including Natsuki, Nao, Midori and Akane.

“Mayo...the priestess is sick.”

“What? And you can't move from there? Can't you teleport her to Dr. Sagisawa?”

“That will be too late for the next dragon's appearance.”

“What!?”

Kanzaki Rei was incensed. He could hardly remain seated. He muttered ‘it's too soon’ under his breath. His facial expression looked like an iron mask.

“What's wrong? Isn't it good enough if Tennouji-san is there to handle it?”

“It's not going to be the same dragon as last time. I told you that I didn't know anything about the black dragon. That isn't too far from the truth. I only know rumors about it. But those rumors are that a great disaster always accompanies its appearance. A disaster so terrible that it noticeably decreases the human population. For this reason, it's sometimes called ‘The Dragon of Reduction.’”

“That means...”

“Well, we don't know whether it's the blue or black dragon yet. But there's a fifty percent chance the world will face a huge disaster.”

To be continued...

My-HiME Destiny ~The Dragon Miko~

By Ibuki Hideaki

Illustrated by Meguro Sankichi

Chapter 8: Steam x The Battle Outside

舞-HiME★ DESTINY ~ 龍の巫女 ~

The sound of rainfall could be heard as far away as the mountains.

The rain, which had been dissipating, had suddenly regained its momentum. The raindrops were so large that they were able to quickly extinguish the sea of fire.

"It looks like we're in luck! Without this rain, the fire in the forest would have spread out of control!"

"Why are we still here, anyways?"

"Ah, I forgot..."

Nao's retracted the comment she shouldn't have said. Natsuki, too, was worried about the condition of the person keeping them here.

They were taking shelter from the rain under a tree. Slumped against the tree's trunk was Mayo, still unconscious. Midori and even Akane were starting to get worried.

Off by herself, and looking calm, was the first year who had saved them, Tennouji Shion. She had brought an end to the crisis that had begun earlier that night by defeating Mayo.

"But how do we know she won't turn into a monster again? Is the dragon really gone?"

"There's no way. Something like that couldn't be destroyed so easily."

"Even so..."

Because Shion wasn't talking, Natsuki had to guess what she was thinking. Dragons are something that appear only in folklore and legends. How could one possibly have been called forth for real!? And how could it be so powerful that an entire academy full of students with special powers were no match for it!? And there's supposed to have been three dragons sealed within Kagura Mayo! That means there's still two left!

"Eh!? No way! So soon!?"

"What is it?"

Natsuki and the others responded quickly to Shion's tense voice.

"Is something going to appear!?"

"Is there something we should do before it appears!?"

"Do something? What could we possibly do?"

"There's a fifty percent chance that the world will face a huge disaster."

"Don't say scary things like that, you glasses girl!"

"Wah! Something's touching my leg!"

"A frog! It's a frog!"

But it wasn't just a frog. Snakes, rabbits, squirrels and other small mountain animals were running past their feet. Maybe they were escaping from the fire and smoke. Or maybe they were afraid of something else...

"Mayo-chan!"

Midori yelled out her name as Mayo's body suddenly vanished. Everyone started panicking and looking around. Of course, it was Shion who found her.

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"Look up."

Mayo's body, which should have been unconscious and immobile, was floating in the air three meters off the ground.

"What!?"

"Calm down. The black mark hasn't reappeared."

Natsuki raised her voice to call out to Akane. When the Suzaku Association was fighting Kouryuu, the feeling of tension in her body was so strong that it gave her goosebumps, but this Mayo didn't give her that feeling...

"You said that the world might face a huge disaster. Do you know for sure yet?"

"I don't."

"You...you don't!?"

In actuality, Shion wasn't paying much attention. She was starting to feel drowsy, and had an expression of tiredness on her face. It seemed like an atmosphere of listlessness was emanating from Mayo's body.

"Huh?"

Mayo raised her hand up to her breasts, watching as she cupped one with it and pushed it upwards. She seemed enamoured with their elasticity as she fondled herself again and again.

"I don't often agree with Kouryuu, but he's left the body of this priestess in excellent condition. It's very comfortable. With this..."

The dragon stopped talking to itself. Shion lept off the ground, teleported to the dragon and went in for the kill, but the sword she had defeated Kouryuu with thrust into empty air. Its target had vanished. Shion lept off the ground once again. She fired off four beams of light from her sword."

"You're so pathetic, kitten-chan. You didn't realize that was an illusion?"

"A mirage! It wasn't real!"

It was strange indeed. Another dragon had appeared so quickly.

"The blue dragon...you're Souryuu, right?"

"If that's what you want to call me, should I call you the tiger priestess?"

"Eh!?"

Shion felt something on her behind, causing her to leap up in shock. Somehow, the dragon had gotten behind her without her realizing!"

"Oh my, where is it? Last time we fought, you had a tiger tail..."

"L...last time!? When!?"

"A bit more than 2000 years ago, I think...by the way, over there..."

Souryuu, in Mayo's body, floated down to the ground and looked over at Natsuki and the others.

"The priestess's friends, right?"

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Before Nao could say that she wasn't Shion's friend, Midori put her hand over her mouth.

"Hmph."

Souryuu briefly looked at Natsuki, Nao, Akane and Midori's faces.

"You all have such ugly faces."

"What did you say!? Lemme go!"

This time, Midori had arm-locked Nao to keep her from escaping.

"Your faces are covered in soot and mud...Hey, you can hear it, right? Longxi..."

Souryuu turned to face Kanzaki Rei. Shion realized that the principal had probably been observing them all along.

"I have a proposal for you."

A proposal from a dragon to a human? This is unexpected...Natsuki and the others looked at each other. What to do now?

"It's a pretty one-sided proposal, though. I'll give you my bargaining point. As things are now, the rain will continue until the fire is put out. But that's not all. It can keep going on after that. For one week...for two weeks..."

Two weeks...Natsuki and the others recalled the huge flood they had seen in Mayo's past. The mayhem, the desperation, the overwhelming water...Kouryuu had been able to manipulate fire, and before them now stood a dragon who could manipulate water.

"Hearing this...you must be thinking about it, Dragon Tamer..."

This wasn't a proposal, it was coercion! What would Souryuu demand? Will the principal accept? Natsuki and the others gulped and watched carefully...



Hm? This room is comfortably warm...

However, the sound of rain could still be heard. So can people's voices. It seems everyone is...

"Uwaa! Bouncy!"

"Your breasts are so big...they look so soft..."

"I...I know that already!"

"I don't think you really understand..."

"Sh...shut up! That's an order!"

"Who cares? It's not like there are any guys around."

"What!? Stop laughing! Take that back! Take that back right now!"

"Cut it out, you two. It looks like she's awake."

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"...Awake? Oh...are they talking about me?" was what the Mayo who was slowly returning to consciousness was thinking.

"Within the white steam is Kuga-senpai and Yuuki Nao. With them is Sugiura-san and Higurashi-san, and Shion-chan as well. Everyone is naked. Eh? And I, Kagura Mayo, am naked as well!"

"But...that's because we're in a bath. Not in the dorm's small bathtub, but rather in a large bath house. There are a bunch of large round rocks in a straight line, facing a fortress of bamboo that provides some refreshing greenery."

"I had no idea the school had an open-air bath like this."

"This is certainly an open air bath, but I don't think we're in the school..."

"What do you mean, Kuga-san?"

"Aren't we in Sapporo's Jouzankei Onsen?"

"Sa...Sapporo!?"

Mayo's shock was understandable. Although they were still in Hokkaido, Hoshinomiya Academy, on the Okhotsk Sea coast, was about 240 kilometers from Sapporo. The distance they had travelled wasn't short. By the way, Jouzankei is the name of a hot spring close to Sapporo. From the center of Sapporo it would take about an hour to get here by car.

"Why are we here!? What about the preparations for the school's cultural festival!?"

"Ah...there was an accident during the preparations, so the cultural festival has been postponed. Instead, we're having this mini class trip."

"A class trip? But Kuga-san is in a different year..."

"D...Don't worry about minor details like that!"

"I can't help but wonder about it..."

"Having a person who doesn't know what happened herself trying to talk about it doesn't help."

"Oi, Nao!"

"The person talking about it...do you mean me?"

In truth, when Souryuu was possessing Mayo's body, the principal ordered that all students be removed from the school. Kanzaki Rei had faced a bitter choice. With the flood waters rising, he had no time to worry about logistical matters like how many people there were or where to send them.

Mayo remembered everyone going to the rooftop, but didn't remember anything that happened after that. Up until now, there have been times when gaps would appear in her memory. She was used to it, but was worried it might be some kind of illness.

"But this is bad! Really bad! Is it really okay for us to be naked in an onsen!? What if there's a male bath here too!?"

She folded her arms and thought about it.

Eventually, she realized something troubling.

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"...Hm?"

She realized her large breasts were sticking out under her crossed arms and opened her eyes.

She at least wanted to keep them covered with her arms. The others didn't seem to care, but that didn't make her feel any better about it. Speaking of which, it's been quite a while since Mayo has been normal like this. She didn't understand why the others seemed so relieved.

"Uwah! The handcuffs are gone!"

Mayo stood up and raised her arms in victory.

"If you're going to stand up without warning like that, at least cover yourself!"

Mayo's celebration had splashed water on everyone. Her joy in the return of her freedom was indescribable. She had been stuck in those handcuffs every day since she arrived at Fuuka Academy.

(Has the seal been broken?)

A safe distance from Mayo's splashing about, Shion was silently observing. The Mayo playing in the onsen seemed to be completely free of Souryuu's presence.

However, the mark was still there. The black mark representing the three dragons remained on Mayo's body.

Not only that, but its location had changed again. Before, it had been above her left breast. Now, it was below her right one. Did its change in location have something to do with the activity of the dragons?

She recalled the principal had called Mayo the "Dragon Priestess", but didn't know much about it aside from that.

Shion plunged her hand deep underwater. She discreetly felt the area around her behind. She was relieved to find that there was nothing there.

("What did he mean "Tiger Tail"...it must have been some kind of bad joke...must have been...but true or not, Souryuu still said it...")

From inside the steam, Shion looked troubled. She couldn't decide whether what the dragon had said was true or not.

Of course, Nao hadn't forgotten about that day. The day that they had faced off in a psychic panty-removal battle. Nao had provoked Mayo into a fight by making fun of her handcuffs. But now, Mayo could freely use both hands, something she eagerly showed Nao.

You're just putting on underwear. It's nothing to be proud about. You're acting like this is your first time doing it, but you do it every day."

"Not like this, I don't!"

(Keh.)

Mayo's swaying and jiggling breasts drew Nao's eyes. Nonetheless, there was someone else with big breasts there. Wearing only panties, Suzushiro Haruka was with them drinking coffee milk.

"This person's breasts (chichi) might be just as big..."

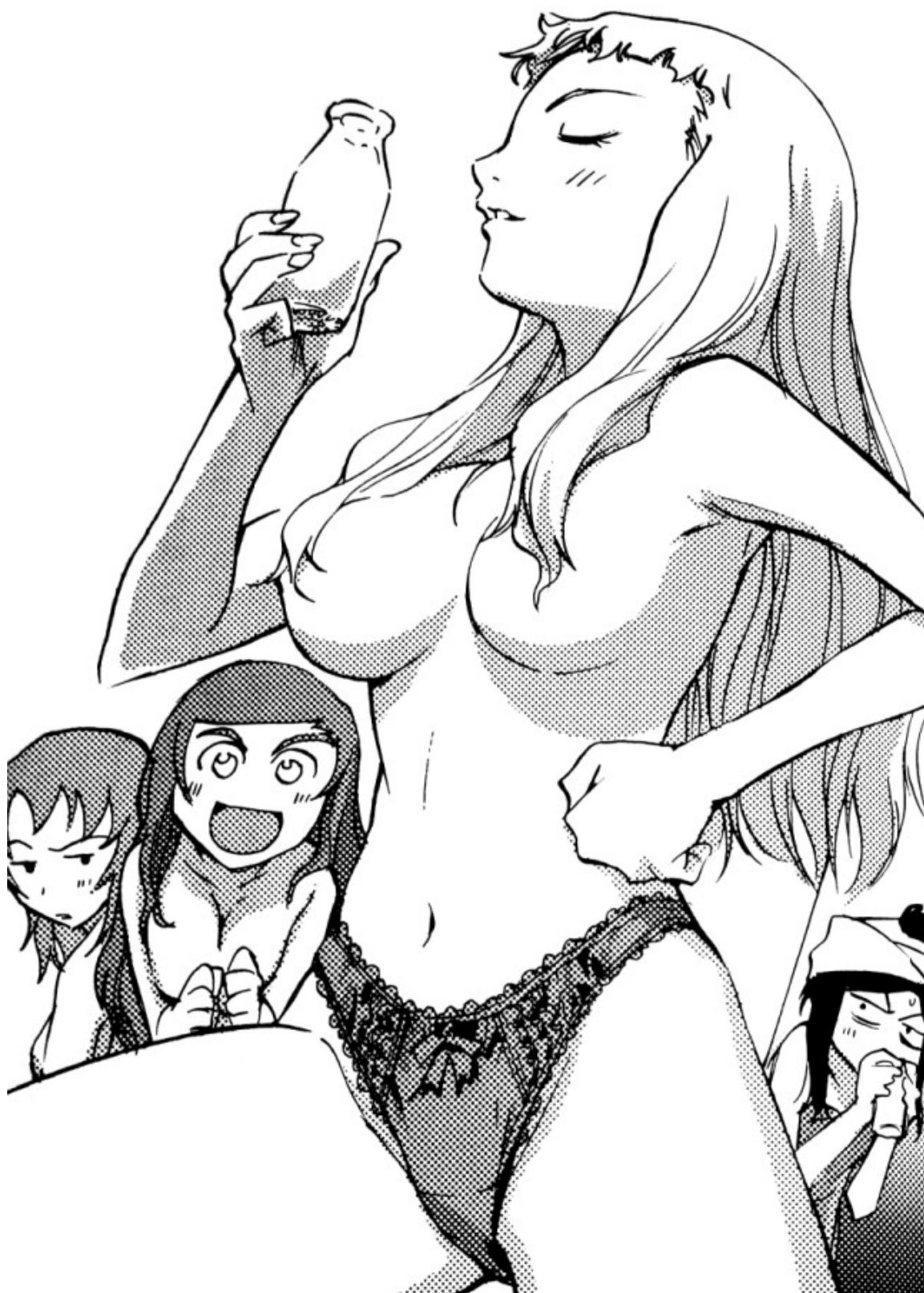
"Did you say something about my father (chichi)!?"

"Th...that's not what I meant!"

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"Jeez..."

Nao brushed off her irritation. Mayo rushed up to Haruka.



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"This is the first time I've ever seen someone drink milk with their hand on their hip in real life! I thought people who did that were just an urban legend, but you really exist! That's so cool!"

"This is just the basics! The basics! It's even in Fuuka Academy's rules (it isn't). You should do it too! Yukino won't drink it though..."

It was understandable that she didn't drink it. There were only five bottles of regular milk and coffee milk left.

"I'll take one...eh? There are only four bottles left?"

"Alright, now put your left hand on your hip and make sure your arm is bent at an angle of exactly 40 degrees. Do your best!"

"Ah...yes!"

Still braless, Mayo delightfully drank a bottle of milk exactly the way Haruka told her to.

From the locker room, with a towel wrapped around her head, Kuga Natsuki grabbed a bottle of milk and sheepishly snuck away.



Below a gap of blue sky, gray and red squirrels were standing in a park. The streets around it were as orderly as a Go board. The sight could be observed from observation deck of the 60-meter tall Sapporo JR Tower. Several busy construction cranes around the city could also be seen.

"Ahh...As I thought, the air here is the best!"

"Saying that fits you so well, even though you keep saying you're seventeen."

"Wh...what does that have to do with anything!?"

"In reality, haven't we just been basically released on parole?"

"Speaking of that, where's Secretary General Suzushiro's group?"

"When we came to Sapporo, didn't she say she was going to conquer the super-spicy curry soup?"

"Uwaa, and she took Yukino-chin with her too, didn't she!"

"Well, I hope they're having fun...I thought that those two were just overseers of the student council, but are they something more than that?"

Nao, who was standing next to Midori, glanced at Mayo. Putting aside the reason, it seems like her handcuffs were removed at the best possible time. Nao wondered what would happen if Mayo were to leave the city.

"Is that a mountain over there!?"

"If it's to the west, then it's Teineyama mountain. It's famous for its skiing and ski-jumping."

"Just as you'd expect from Shion-chan!"

"It's just what's written on this plaque here."

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"I think we should start going back down..."

With Natsuki saying that, everyone began to exit the observation deck, but not before quickly checking out the clothes and accessories in the gift shop. After that, they began to descend back down the tower.

While they were atop the tower, they had come up with a plan. They didn't have much time. They had to become familiar with the landscape of Sapporo. First, they strolled idly around the station. In the pleasant early summer weather, surrounded by stylish, brightly-colored signboards, the girls walked with a bounce in their step.

"It's been a long time since I've had the feeling of being in a city."

"My body still feels too much like it's in the mountains..."

"It's like being in the land of the giants."

"What do you mean?"

"Because the roads are so wide. The ceiling in the station building was really high too."

"Mayo-chin, you're from Kanagawa, right?"

"Yokohama...Kawasaki...Sagamihara...Tokyo...I've lived in all those places. Suginami and Mitaka too."

"What kind of places did you go to in Tokyo? Wasn't it full of people?"

"It's better here. Even though we're in a city, it isn't humid at all. I like it."

"Would you say the same thing if we were here in the middle of winter?"

"Speaking of that, wouldn't it be great to see the snow festival?"

"It would be nice if we could come again..."

The person who said that was actually the person who was responsible for the trip, the blissfully unaware Mayo. Of course, Natsuki and the others let this irony pass.

"Hey, doesn't it feel like there's something off about us?"

"Hm? The uniform?"

"No, I mean, isn't it weird for there to be so many female highschool students and yet not one of us is checking a cellphone for mail?"

That isn't really necessarily true. Midori just said that because she had seen some girls reading and sending mail through a fast-food shop window.

"Even if you say that, we can't because we don't have cellphones."

"Of course, of course."

Normally, when they wanted to contact other Fuuka Academy students, all they had to do was use telepathy.

"Ah! I just remembered something! Last time I was in a city like this, I could hear the thoughts of people from all across the city. It was disgusting."

"You mean like noise or radio interference?"

舞-HiME★ DESTINY ~ 龍の巫女 ~

"It didn't really feel like that..."

"That's happened to me too!"

"This is just speculation, but maybe in addition to our lessons and practice, having been exposed to the telepathy jamming equipment in the academy caused us to learn to suppress our power?"

As they listened to Shion's theory, Mayo and the others exchanged glances.

"Hmph. I guess Fuuka Academy managed to be helpful for once. What do you think, Akane-san?"

"Eh? Ah...um...maybe..."

Mayo's eyes met with Higurashi Akane's as Akane gave her nervous reply. "This girl...how much does she remember?" Akane wondered. Akane knew the terrible things behind Mayo's simple-mindedness. She also wondered if it was really okay for someone like her to be here with the others.

"What about this?"

"Eh? This?"

"It's a famous clock tower."

"Ah, this. I didn't think it was on this street."

If they had known that the clock tower was a major tourist attraction, they might have stayed at it longer. It has white, wooden walls and a pointy red roof. Its clock had been made more than 100 years ago.

"It's unexpectedly small. Not very different from the one at the academy."

"....."

"Eh? Did I say something wrong?"

"I'll explain when we go back."

Natsuki answered Mayo's confused look with a bitter smile. The clocktower at the academy's rooftop had been completely destroyed by Mayo when she was possessed by Kouryuu. The Suzaku Association had been completely destroyed as well.

("When we go back, huh?")

Akane had wanted to escape the academy. Realizing that she may now have the choice not to go back was quite a shock.

(The way things are, do you have anywhere else to go?)



"Once we're used to this, how about we go see some bears at the zoo?"

"Ah, very well."

Urging Fumi Himeno was the seated Kanzaki Rei. He picked up a telephone receiver, was given a page of instructions by someone, received a report, and checked his mail. At the same time, he kept an eye on a large monitor displaying a map of Sapporo. Icons that probably marked the students' locations moved

舞-HiME★ DESTINY ~ 龍の巫女 ~

around on the screen.

"Okay, it looks like the girls are heading back."

"It's because they trust you, Chairwoman Himeno."

"Eh? Surely it's also because they're more at ease since they don't expect the principal to be able to track them under these conditions."

"That may be so, but there's still the matter of the priestess among the students. As of yet, we still don't know the dragon's goal..."

Three dragons were sealed inside Kagura Mayo. They had expected them to slowly be released, but the releases were proceeding faster than predicted. It was only a small blessing that the black dragon of ruin, Kokuryuu, had not appeared. They were at least a little better off with Souryuu.

The first dragon to appear had been Kouryuu. A dragon with a combative personality and incredible offensive abilities. But at least his patterns of thought and action were easy to predict. However, in the case of Souryuu, making predictions was much more difficult.

"He spoke as though he were an infuriated emperor."

That's what Fumi originally thought. Wandering about the room, talking on the telephone, staring down the map, reciting his vast knowledge. The academy chief had been doing those things for hours.

"Have you learned anything new about the dragon?"

"Long ago, the scholars who wrote the Nihon Shoki left behind the term "kanpi." Originally, it referred to the practice of domesticating dragons so that humans could fly through the air on their backs. However, even with these domesticated dragons, if a person touched the underside of their necks, where there is only one thin layer of scales, they would immediately be bitten to death."

"Wow. Scary."

"The problem is that I still don't know what could bring out such a haughty wrath in a dragon."

Rei stood up and began walking around the room.

How long would he do this for? Fumi, however, seemed happy nonetheless. Everytime Rei told a story, it was always unique. It was incredible that the principal knew enough about the history of humans and dragons to produce such variation.

Perhaps today's incident would write a new page in that history. As for things like panties and milk-drinking poses...Fumi didn't know anything about that...



"Does that high school student think she can get away!?"

"Eh!?"

Higurashi Akane's face was frozen.

Before her eyes had appeared a giant crab! Actually, it was a person wearing a crab costume, but the costume felt just like a real crab shell, and it even foamed from the mouth! It has a very evil feeling to it.

舞-HiME★ DESTINY ~ 龍の巫女 ~

Akane didn't mind though. It was just like being at sea. From behind her, she felt a tap on her shoulder. Behind her was a white sea creature that looked similar to a jellyfish. It was even translucent like the ones she'd seen on TV! Its cute shape had earned the species the name of "sea angel".

"Ah, this could be okay!"

Akane's relief lasted only a moment. As the sea angel swayed left and right, she saw that there was a gaping hole in its head, with six long tentacles reaching out of it.

"Kyaaaaaaa!!!"

"Hah! Nice reaction, Akane-chin!"

As the crab and sea angel hoisted up Akane and carried her away from the guest seating, she saw Midori waving her hand in the air excitedly.

"The Japanese name for a sea angel is "Hadaka Kamegai." Despite being called the angel of the ice floes, it's a carnivorous creature. Tentacles called buccal cones come out of its head to capture its prey."

"So this is just a performance, Midori-san? With Shion-chan playing the tsukkomi!?"

"Eh!? Then who's the boke!?"

A nervous Mayo was hiding behind Nao. However, Akane's scream had made a huge impact. The event area was packed!

They were in the main street event park. While walking around the area around the station, Sugiura Midori had seen a flashy billboard advertising a hero show, and suggested that they go see it.

A lot of people had shown up for it, and Mayo and the others had to wait in the back of the line. Nonetheless, when the seating opened, they were able to find seats. However, they were quite a distance from the stage. They still ended up getting attacked by a group of bad guys though.

"As I thought, a group of beautiful girls wearing school uniforms was sure to stand out!"

"Forget that, what's going to happen to Akane-san!?"

"Oh, she's just being used as bait to lure out the justice fighters."

"B...Bait!?"

"So Crabman and Sea Angelman are going to take her to the stage where Marimowoman and Sea Urchin Riceman are?"

"But what will happen to her!?"

"Municipalities and corporations have been creating local heroes for years! It's been like this since the birth of Japan, Natsuki-chin. In this case, the bad guys could be from anywhere. Hokkaido is the perfect place for them to gather."

"You say that like it's really true...well, I guess you are a history nerd, so you might know something about this area..."

"Hah. You never forget stuff you learned way back."

"I'm worried about just how far back..."

"I'm worried about something too."

舞-HiME★ DESTINY ~ 龍の巫女 ~

"Eh!? You too Shion!?"

"The design of that villain. It's not a red king crab, but a blue king crab. Maybe they bought the wrong costume by accident, or the designer just made a mistake without realizing it or looking them up. By the way, even though the hermit crab is often grouped with the red and blue king crabs, it's actually not a crab at all."

"You make some pretty serious observations."

"It's how I am. It can't be helped. But there's something else I'm worried about..."

"What a troublesome disposition."

"I can't read the thoughts of those villains."

"Eh!? Really? Could it be because of the costumes they're wearing?"

Hearing something so weird caused the expression on Natsuki's face to change. Even if they're wearing costumes, if there are humans inside it should be possible to read their minds.

"If this place has the same telepathy-blocking equipment the academy does, I'm not able to detect it. There doesn't seem to be any mechanical interference."

"So the monsters are real monsters? There's no way..."

"By nature, Kuga Natsuki was a realist. Even when Hinagiku Tomoe had made it seem like they were being attacked by a minotaur and griffin, she knew it was impossible and was able to see through her illusions. If she hadn't seen Mayo's body taken over by a dragon with her own eyes, she never would have believed it."

"Red King Crabman, Sea Angelman, Marimowoman, Sea Urchin Riceman...It's impossible! Maybe there could be a 0.01% chance there could be a real sea urchinman, but a sea urchin riceman...that's impossible!"

"No, a regular sea urchinman would be impossible too. You're pretty funny sometimes."

"Funny? My point is completely valid. Crabs and sea urchins are living things, but sea urchin rice is a cooked dish. How could it become a villain?"

"That's a funny way of thinking about it too."

A sudden uproar from the audience drowned out Natsuki and Nao's bickering.

"Wh...what!?"

It was exactly the time when the monsters should have ascended to the stage with Higurashi Akane.

"Wait a minute!"

Suddenly, a girl with twintail hair appeared to block their path. She jump-kicked Red King Crabman.

"Give back Akane-san!"

"Uwah! Mayo!?"

"That idiot!"

"When we talked about not being able to read their minds, was Mayo listening?"

"No, I think she'd already left her seat by then."

舞-HiME★ DESTINY ~ 龍の巫女 ~

"Stop it, you guys!"

The commotion in the event all died down a bit. The voices of parents, children and special-effects fans could be heard more clearly. They were saying things like "Maya!", "Kaguchi Maya-chan!", "The person in the middle!" The flashes of digital cameras could be seen everywhere.

"Maya? The person in the middle?"

"As I thought. They did look a bit alike..."

"What are you talking about!?"

Before Midori could answer Natsuki's question, the MC's voice boomed throughout the hall.

"Wh...what's this!? Kaguchi Maya-chan has made a surprise entrance!"

"Wow...a true professional. He sure knows how to ad-lib."

"Kaguchi Maya?"

"On the poster, the main character was wearing their post-transformation disguise, and their name wasn't on it. And I don't think they were supposed to appear just yet."

"Because of that, suddenly having someone they think is the hero appear is a huge surprise! But besides that, Mayo doesn't realize the situation! What if the show's manager does something?"

"Accidents happen sometimes. It's part of the fun of live action."

"If this is really just some flashy show, then it's probably okay not to care, but..."

"What is it, Shion?"

"Not being able to read the minds of the villains makes me nervous...and there's the potential that the dragon could re-emerge..."

"!!!!!!"

"Even if it's just the red or blue dragon, we'll be in trouble. The entire city of Sapporo could become a sea of flames."

"What's with that smirk on your face, Nao!?"

"What are you going to do in a place like this full of people? Are you going to start showing off your powers in the era of mass-communication?"

"That's..."

In place of the stuttering Natsuki, Midori stepped forward.

"It's perfect! This is the staging grounds of a super-flashy show! And we have exactly five girls, just like the hero team! If we take advantage of the confusion right away, we can slip into the show!"

"It's perfect!? The hero team!?"

"Maybe you didn't see the billboard, Natsuki-chin. This show's name is..."

"Ahahaha, you've crossed the Tsugaru-Kaikyou line, Kaguchi Maya!"

舞-HiME★ DESTINY ~ 龍の巫女 ~

"Give back Akane-san!"

"Oh yeah? Why don't you make me? This high school girl is our prisoner!"

Mayo looked in Akane's direction. Blocking the path between herself and Akane was Sea Urchin Riceman. He was holding a microphone to his mouth.

"Come, my servants!"

With that signal, figures wearing full-body tights rose up from beneath the stage. There were about ten of them. Making a strange sound, they surrounded Mayo together with the rest of the monsters.

"Now that we've lured you out all alone, what will you do?"

The monsters began drawing closer to the outnumbered Mayo.

"Gah!"

Mayo had been backed to the edge of the stage. Part of the soles of her shoes were hanging over the edge. One more step and she'd fall into the seats.

"Stop right there! Maya isn't alone!"

"Wh...who said that!"

"We're the Bishoujo Sentai HiME Rangers!"

Of course, the sudden appearance of Midori and the others was so surprising that he fell backwards.

"Now! Out of my way!"

Mayo suddenly charged towards the enemy combatants before her. One after another they flew into mid-air. Of course, this was due to Mayo using her telekinesis.

"Oooh, they're flying!"

"A trampoline? Or are they using harnesses?"

"Either way, it's incredible!"

"More than anything, the mini skirt action is moving people to tears!"

The crowd let out a huge cheer. White smoke poured forth from both ends of the stage. To the tune of a catchy BGM, the action scene began. Midori immediately rushed in excitedly. Shion calmly tried to count the number of legs on Red King Crabman. "What am I doing here?" wondered Nao. Marimowoman vowed not to give up, but got clobbered by Natsuki. This is how the melee between the villains and heroes began.

(Do we know what trick these guys are using yet?)

Despite being in the middle of a fight, Natsuki could still communicate with Shion via telepathy.

(Judging from their ability to ad-lib, I don't think they're robots. Maybe they're something similar to us...)

(Come again?)

(Maybe they have psychic powers too.)

舞-HiME★ DESTINY ~ 龍の巫女 ~

(Ah...hey, Mayo!)

Facing the monsters' apparent leader, Sea Urchin Riceman, Mayo leapt through the air. She extended her arm and clotheslined his neck. This was a professional wrestling technique known as the Jumping Neck-Breaker Drop.

"How!?"

Mayo had put all of her power into that attack. The force was so great that as Sea Urchin Riceman fell backwards, the bowl that was his head fell off.

"Eh? His neck is..."

"Calm down, it's just a prop."

As his head fell off, Natsuki rushed over to look inside the costume. When she did, a look of shock came to Natsuki's face. Looking down his neck, she found that his interior was completely hollow.

"Idiot! What are you doing!?"

And then...

(Students of Fuuka Academy!)

(Eh!?)

A terrible voice rang out in Mayo and the other's heads. But it wasn't a voice they knew. Someone they didn't know was communicating with them via telepathy.

(Um...next time smoke is released, you should be able to take advantage of the opportunity to escape the stage.)

(Who are you? You know about Fuuka Academy?)

(Okay, hurry up. You'll mess this up if your timing is off by even a bit.)

"My...my neck! Kaguchi Maya! The way things are going, I'll have to change into Scallop Riceman! Commence the counterattack!"

To the audience's delight, a fresh supply of underlings began to appear as smoke shot wildly out of the stage.

(Now! Go!)

(But what about Akane-san!?)

(Don't worry, don't worry, she'll be returned.)

At that moment, Higurashi Akane let out a shriek of "Kyaa! Kyaa!"

"Wait, how long have you been touching me!"

She resisted against Sea Angelman, sweeping away his arm.

"Adadadada!"

"That's going too far...even if there aren't any people inside..."

舞-HiME★ DESTINY ~ 龍の巫女 ~

"They never said they'd latch onto her like that!"

The tentacles coming from Sea Angelman's head were the same as the ones he had used to harrass Akane when she was still in the audience. But despite having seen them once before, Akane was still surprised.

"She doesn't realize it's the same tentacles again!"

"Gyaaaaah!!"

A flashy spiral appeared underneath Sea Angelman. The angel of the ice floes crashed down into the hell beneath the stage as Akane vanished. Exciting music started playing as the five beautiful heroes entered the stage. Wild applause echoed throughout the theatre.



Removed from the excitement, the team was now stuck backstage.

"Let's see if I've got this right. Before, when you went on stage, each one of you was pretending to be a different one of the heroes?"

Drinking a box of applejuice and looking back at the performance was Yuuki Nao.

"Oh, that's right. And we all agreed upon a pose. It was one Nao-chin wanted, right?"

"I...I'm not some weirdo! It was just something I remembered seeing on TV once!"

"Heh..."

Wiping sweat from her forehead with a towel, Midori had a look of satisfaction on her face.

"We did a pretty good impersonation for not being able to transform though."

"I don't know if I'd say that, but it's good that we got through it uninjured."

"There's something strange though. Everyone was shouting "Kaguchi Maya! Kaguchi Maya!" And on the way to the bathroom, people kept asking me to sign autographs."

"I thought you were taking a long time! But is that really something that strange?"

"Hm...I don't know..."

"Jeez..."

"What about Higurashi? She was pretending to be weak when she should have been able to escape whenever she wanted."

"Well, it would have ruined the show if she had escaped. What I'm worried about is how the villain's costumes were empty..."

"There was that voice too. This show is pretty enigmatic."

"Looks like the person who can give us some answers has turned up."

Shion pointed to the waiting room door. The sound of footsteps could be heard from behind it. The show had finished, and the performers and crew had returned backstage.

舞-HiME★ DESTINY ~ 龍の巫女 ~

"Sorry for making you wait."

The protagonist of "Bishoujo Sentai HiME Rangers", HiME Red, began taking off her helmet.

"No, we're the ones who caused trouble."

Natsuki withdrew the hand she had extended for a handshake. The helmet of HiME red was empty!

"Ahahahaha, sorry. I'm the real one."

The one who said that was HiME Pink. Laughing, she also removed her helmet. Inside was a cute girl with braided hair."

"Sorry for teasing you. It's been a long time since I've seen that uniform!"

"So you know about Fuuka Academy?"

"Yes, I'm an alumni of Fuuka Academy. One of the first. But you're not supposed to be able to leave the school grounds. Did you guys sneak out?"

"Well, not exactly."

"I see...is that bald principal doing okay?"

"He's as scary-looking as ever."

"Natsuki's brow furrowed as she said that, but the girl with the braids just said "Right, right." and laughed."

"Anyways, aren't you kind of young to be an alumni? I would've pegged you for a junior high student."

Nao was being as tactless as always.

"Ehehe, do I really look like a junior high student? My breasts may be small, but I'm actually 16 years old."

"Sixteen? You're the same age as Shion-chan!"

Mayo was so surprised that her twintails stood erect.

"I skipped grades and graduated two years ago."

"You can do that!? I can't believe they'd let someone graduate at fourteen!"

With that, the costumes of both the bishoujo sentai and their enemies hung themselves up on their hangers. Every single costume was empty. Both during the performance and in the waiting room, they moved solely by the force of this girl's powers.

"This explains why their minds couldn't be read. However, to be able to move them all simultaneously, and even give them voices. Surely, this is the ability of a genius."

So impressed was she with the the girl's incredible level of technique that the always-calm Shion was moved to the point where her voice was trembling.

"Huh? A genius? To me, this is just my job..."

"...Arika-san?"

"Hm?"

舞-HiME★ DESTINY ~ 龍の巫女 ~

"I knew it! You're Fuuka Academy's legendary student, Yumemiya Arika! The senpais in third year talk about you. But why is someone of your ability doing a job like this? I mean, something like a stage show..."

"That's..."

Arika pondered Shion's question for a moment.

"Isn't just liking it good enough?"

"It's not good enough."

"Um...things like making the heroes do amazing stunts on stage, and making incredible special effects...they're easy to do using psychokinetic powers. So I'm able to help everyone in the audience have fun...and I have fun too...um..."

Mayo grabbed both of Arika's hands tightly.

"Psychokinetic powers can be used for anything, but you're using them to make people happy! That's the best!"

"That's just what Kaguchi Maya would say."

"I'm Kagura Mayo."

"Mayo? Between Maya and Mayo, I wonder which is better...Maya-chan..."

Suddenly, the expression in Arika's eyes changed.

"Something wrong?"

"Eh!?"

Natsuki and the others were suddenly taken aback. Could it be that Arika had detected Mayo's secret. She was someone with the abilities of a genius, after all. It would certainly be plausible that she could sense the dragon lurking deep within Mayo, and it would be a big problem if she did. The tension in the room was palpable.

"This is..."

"Kyaa!"

Arika grabbed Mayo's blouse and pushed it up, revealing her breasts.

Your breasts are big and bouncy just like Kaguchi Maya's! Next time we meet, we'll have to do something together! Something other than the show."

"S...something together? With me?"

Natsuki and the others let out a sigh of relief as Arika let go of Mayo's breasts.



"Time for roll-call. If there's anyone who isn't here, be sure to tell Sagisawa-sensei."

They were returning by chartered bus. Several of the students had been going around downtown Sapporo trying extra-spicy curry soup, causing Yukino's lips to suffer serious inflammation.

舞-HiME★ DESTINY ~ 龍の巫女 ~

"Going back by bus is a pain..."

"The vacation atmosphere is totally gone."

"Sensei, Midori-chan isn't here."

Mayo, who had just noticed Midori's absense, informed Sagisawa Youko.

"You don't have to worry. She's just coming back seperately from us because she's prone to terrible bus-sickness."

"Okay."

"Jeez...getting drunk from teleporting...getting sick from riding a bus...she sure has it tough."

"Even though she was so energetic during the HiME Rangers show."

"Isn't it natural she would run out of energy after that? We worked hard too."

As Nao pointed out, Natsuki and the others were nodding off a bit too.

"Fuuka Academy graduates sure are powerful..."

"In the end, I'm still here." Higurashi Akane thought as she stared out the window at Sapporo Station cloaked in darkness. There had been many chances for her to escape.

It had been a long time since she'd enjoyed walking around a city's streets. She didn't care much for the special-effectss shows, but even that turned out to be exciting.

Starting tomorrow, they would once again be locked away in that mountain academy, living their day-to-day life as they always had. The battle with the student council might be over, but it seemed unlikely that tranquility would return.

Remembering the scene of Arika wiping the sweat from her smiling face, they felt happy. Fuuka Academy, which they had thought of as the home of some kind of conspiracy, was indeed a school meant to teach children with psychokinesis to find a place in society after all. Throughout the world, there must be several graduates just like Arika. It wasn't just a prison after all.



"In the end, the reason for the trip to Sapporo was because the Dragon God itself wanted to have fun...no, that's no good. Nobody will believe something like that."

Sugiura Midori turned off the digital voice recorder and mumbled something to herself.

"More importantly, how do I find out more about the dragon god itself? ...Oh, it's about time."

The bus full of Fuuka Academy students began to move. From the main street, it went north. Midori watched everything from a department store rooftop. She wasn't acting like the cheerful 17-year-old she usually did.

"In any case, that alumni really surprised me. Yumemiya Arika, was it? It seemed like she suspected something. I'll have to check her out.....but first, the report! It's not like I absolutely hate having to write out reports, but I don't think those soulless beaurocrats understand the situation. The reality of the matter is that the way things are going, the world could be destroyed before they wake up the situation."